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This issue of "Media and Values" helps students acquire and evaluate media information in order to be effective citizens. The individual articles include: (1) "In the Light of the Fires" (Elizabeth Thoman); (2) "From Milton to Media" (Clay Jenkinson); (3) "Brave New World" (Paul Du Bois; Frances Moore Lappe); (4) "Making Politics Work" (Jay Rosen); (5) "The Paradox of Political Advertising" (Kathleen Jamieson); (6) "Not a Bang, But a Whimper" (Wally Bowen); (7) "Around the World: TV Campaigning Varies Widely" (Howard Frederick); and (8) "How Talk Radio Can Work For You" (Barbara Osborn). The issue concludes with a list of resources and other viewpoints. (EH)

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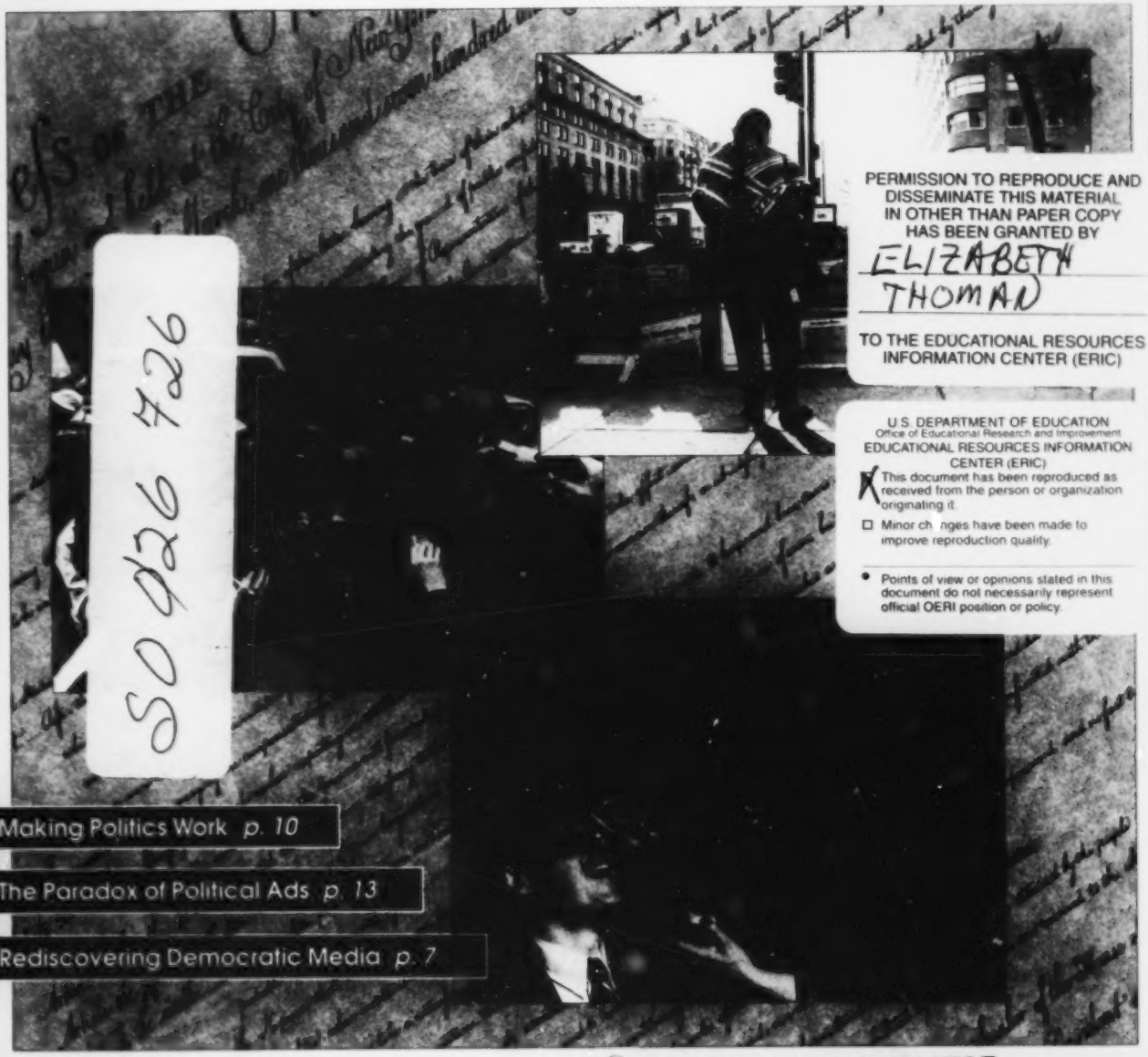
RETHINKING DEMOCRACY:
Citizenship in the Media Age



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In addition to publishing *Media&Values*, the Center creates educational curriculum materials for local use, organizes forums and conferences, and maintains an information and resource center on the media issues of our time. Funding for the Center comes from subscriptions and memberships along with individual donations, foundation grants and organizational co-sponsorships.

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Editorial/Business Office
1962 South Shenandoah Street, Los Angeles, CA 90034 (310)559-2944

In Canada
85 St. Clair Avenue E, Room 500, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8

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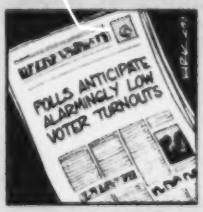

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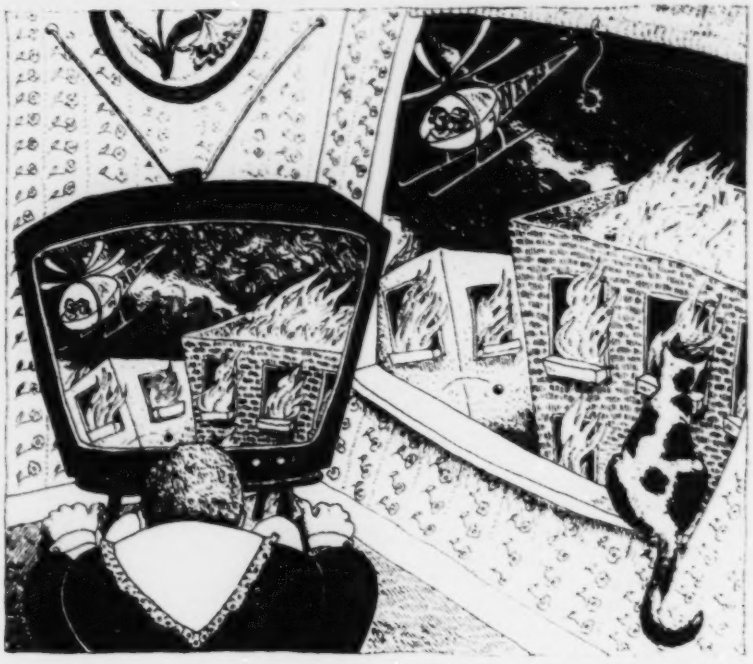
IN THE LIGHT OF THE FIRES

By Elizabeth Thoman

Throughout this issue we address the media's mandate to provide meaningful political discourse, an abstract phrase that we struggle to define.

But there's nothing abstract about the object lesson we all received here in Los Angeles this spring on what can happen when political discourse fails. If I have any doubt about its concreteness, all I have to do is walk down the street and look at the boarded up appliance store in the mini-mall and the charred front of the little Mom and Pop store on the corner.

The fires are out now and the cameras are busy. TV screens that reflected infernos soon framed presidential candidates tromping through the rubble for the obligatory photo opportunity.



Media critics ponder the role of reporting in inflaming the rioters: Did TV pictures serve as a guide to likely targets? Did they play a role in making the disturbance acceptable? Did they create stereotypical heroes and villains? In a final irony for a riot ignited by the decision in the Rodney King case, looters who smiled for the TV camera one week are not laughing anymore. Videotapes that failed to convict four policemen of excessive force may be enough to condemn *them* of looting.

The TV cameras revealed a fatal flaw in the interconnections of our society. But in a different way, the frustration they reflected exists in the suburbs as well as the ghettos and barrios. Many people throughout the nation and the world are asking: Is anyone listening out there?

The problems of political discourse don't begin and end with the campaign trail, and the media are not the only institutions responsible for the general malaise we are feeling. But as the glue that binds our society together, the media do bear a heavy responsibility for feeding us a diet of scandals, controversies and personalities while failing to explore issues of concern to real people they reach.

When we answer the perennial question "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" there are other questions to ponder, such as: "Am I being informed about the ways political candidates propose to deal with the problems of society? Do I know how and why issues, programs and policies are shaping the things I care about? Do I believe that my vision for a good society is being articulated and shared by politicians, media commentators and government officials?"

According to a Kettering Foundation study, many Americans, like citizens in other countries, yearn to take an active role in politics. But people lack three things: knowledge of how the political system works, a belief that they can make a difference and a process for engaging policy makers in an honest dialogue to discuss their concerns and seek solutions.

It is easy to make the media the whipping post for these deficiencies. But we believe these concerns have validity. Until the media reflect the concerns of people, not the corporate establishment that directs them, they will be able to frame only establishment answers. Worse still, they will be unable even to ask the right questions.

The means exist to do better. As several of our authors suggest, a mix of new technologies with the right goals and training could help people connect both with each other and with the powers that shape our lives. Even our current media structures can be better used by people who understand how they work and how to seek and evaluate the information needed for intelligent decision-making.

The suggestions provided in this issue can map the first steps on this road—steps that must be taken. I think we all would rather illuminate the darkness with the light of communication than put out fires.

Elizabeth Thoman is executive director of the Center for Media and Values.

Phyllis Martinez is a freelance illustrator in Los Angeles.

FROM MILTON TO MEDIA:
Information Flow in a Free Society

By Clay Jenkinson

"Give me liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties."

—John Milton

It is commonly believed that as a child of the Enlightenment, the United States inherited and installed a libertarian model of the press.

The actual history of U.S. free expression is not so simple. In fact, most of the Founding Fathers were as suspicious of unlimited freedom of expression as they were of democracy. Although the era of revolutions led to unprecedented freedom of publication, government in the new republic found ways to leash speech it considered irresponsible.

Virtually unlimited freedom of expression is a recent and fragile development in political history. Even in the 20th Century, the press has been most free in times of peace and prosperity. In periods of national and especially international tension, the U.S. government has found it necessary to institute censorship or other constraints.

In simplest terms, the libertarian model (not to be confused with the political party of the same name) argues that truth is to be sought in a free marketplace of ideas. Ideas, like economies, benefit from competition, which leads to refinement and clarification. In the unfettered collision of ideas, the principle holds, truth will eventually, if not immediately, emerge triumphant.

For government to interfere would be to distort the process and forestall the triumph of truth. Ideas are sometimes dangerous, but not so dangerous as the government that would restrain them.

This libertarian theory of the press has its roots in 17th Century Britain. It was born of three forces: the Renaissance spirit of open inquiry, the spread of the printing press, and revolution. In his tract *Areopagitica* (1644), its most famous advocate, John Milton, Latin Secretary to the Puritan Interregnum and author of the great English epic *Paradise Lost*, wrote: "I can-

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not praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for.... That which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary."

Milton's majestic prose was marshaled against the Puritan government's licensing act of June 1643, which could be used to impose prior restraint on authors whose views it disliked. Milton provided the classical formulation of the principle that truth is most likely to emerge in a "free and open encounter."

For the political philosopher John Locke, freedom of expression was not so much a natural right as a form of intellectual humility and an exercise in social harmony. Providing a more secular interpretation of the marketplace of ideas at the end of the British revolutionary period, Locke recommended that we "commiserate our mutual ignorance and endeavor to remove it in all the gentle and fair ways of information."

But the greatest 18th Century articulation of the libertarian principle comes not from a political theorist but from John Erskine, a lawyer who defended writer and pamphleteer Thomas Paine's controversial *Rights of Man* in a London court.

Erskine argued that every man, "not intending to mislead, but seeking to enlighten others with what his own reason and conscience, however erroneously, have dictated to him as truth, may address himself to the universal reason of the whole nation."

Although Paine was convicted, Erskine's view that "other liberties are held under government, but the liberty of opinion keeps governments themselves in due subjection to their duties," carried the theory of free expression to a new height.

Such statements as these are enlightened and eloquent, but they do not tell the whole story. The principles of free expression these writers articulated were never as absolute in practice as it might seem when

their boldest formulations are quoted out of context. Milton, for example, demanded freedom of expression for himself and for responsible Protestants, but he sought to deny it to Catholics, atheists, some Anglicans, and non-Christians, i.e., a majority of English citizens. John Locke argued that flourished in its fullest formulation even in the United States.

The United States was born in a rush of revolutionary rhetoric. Libertarian principles and human rights were invoked by the American insurgents in their struggle to free themselves from the colonial yoke.

"What is liberty of the press? Who can give it any definition which would not leave the utmost latitude for evasion? I hold it to be impracticable; and from this, I infer, that its security... must altogether depend on public opinion and on the general spirit of the people and of the government."

Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist*

"no opinions contrary to human society or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society are to be tolerated by the magistrate." And though Erskine defended Thomas Paine's political heresies, he could not stomach the famous pamphleteer's religious opinions. In 1797 Erskine joined the prosecution when Paine was tried for his provocative anti-religious text, *The Age of Reason*.

Short of Ideal

It is one of the ironies of history that bold pronouncements of free expression have frequently been intended for only partial (and partisan) application. The marketplace of ideas must be free—except for members of the religious, political or social opposition. Upon closer inspection, the libertarian principle usually can be found to mean freedom of expression for "serious" thinkers, for scholars and statesmen, but not for rebels, heretics, and ephemeral journalists. The free marketplace model is usually invoked by members of the opposition. Absolute libertarians are few. To this day, although restrictions on government censorship are well established, this tension between ideal and practice is reflected in the continuing conflicts that surround the definitions of pornography, libel and the publication, filming or broadcast of opinions that many consider controversial or obnoxious.

Such events as the Red Scare that followed World War I and the Pentagon Papers case during the Vietnam War remind us that freedom of expression has never

The prospect of liberty inspired an articulation of idealism, aspiration, and natural rights on an unprecedented scale. It appeared—briefly—that the program of the Enlightenment might be instantaneously inscribed on the *tabula rasa* of the New World. Freedom of commerce, of assembly, of conscience, of the press would flourish on American soil. The United States' first experiments in constitution-making (including the Articles of Confederation) were hopeful, bordering on utopian.

Ironically, the success of the American Revolution led to a partial disintegration of these yeasty principles. Colonists who had united to fight for national independence found, once the foreign oppressor was gone, that they disagreed considerably in temperament and in their visions of an American social order. Many (most notably Alexander Hamilton) who had spouted libertarian concepts in the heat of the insurrection made it clear that they did not wish to be held to such dangerous principles now that it was time to create governments in the United States. Those who did not lose their revolutionary edge were dismayed by the rise of a party of high-toned Federalism. Thomas Jefferson spoke for thousands of Americans when he suggested, from Paris, that the new constitution of 1787 was too nationalist, too consolidated. It was, he said, like bringing in a hawk to police the henhouse. In the aftermath of the peace settlement with Britain in 1783, the United States took a conservative turn. In particular, the excesses of the French Revolution put the old libertarian principles on the defensive in America.

A Last Stand

The Bill of Rights of 1791 may be seen as the last great expression of the idealism of the American Revolution. The 55 founders who met in Philadelphia to write the 1787 constitution did not produce a declaration of rights. The Bill of Rights was appended to the constitution four years later. James Madison shepherded the first 10 amendments through the first Congress of the United States, not because he considered them critical to the maintenance of civil liberties in America, but because the citizens of the new republic—led by Jefferson and his Virginia compatriot George Mason—demanded a Bill of Rights as the price of constitutional ratification.

At face value the First Amendment encapsulates the best of the Miltonic tradition. Its insistence that Congress "shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press" would seem to provide a solid constitutional foundation for the erection of the free marketplace of ideas—at least in the national arena. In fact, it was routinely construed throughout the early republican period of our history as scarcely more than an agreeable ideal.

"Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost."

Thomas Jefferson to Dr. James Currie, 1786

The reason for the tension between the apparent absolutism of the First Amendment and its somewhat more pedestrian legal status is not far to seek. First, because of the peculiarity of its adoption, the Bill of Rights was never carefully debated by the constitution-makers, by members of the First Congress, or by the citizenry. The framers discussed a Bill of Rights only briefly—in general rather than specific terms—before adjourning without adopting

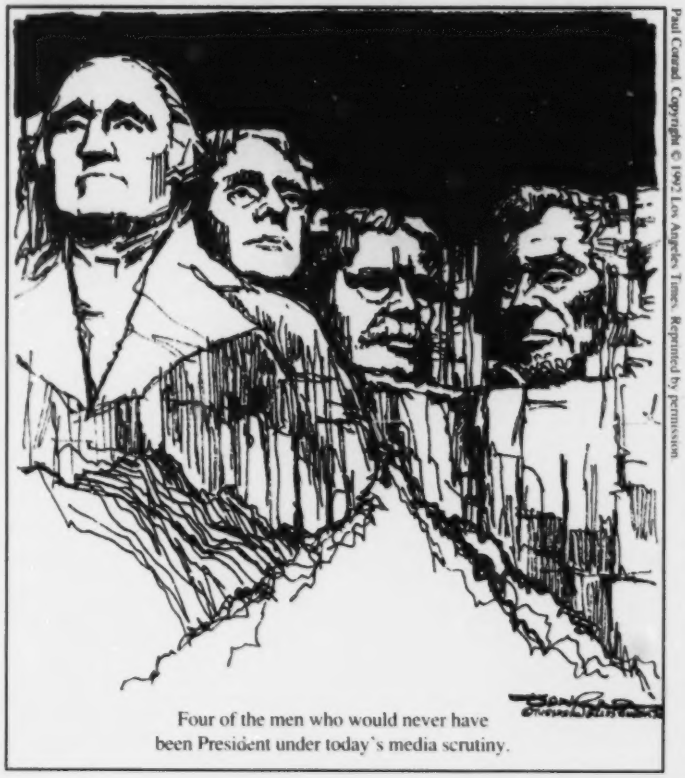
one in September of 1787.

When it became clear that a declaration of rights must be adopted before the people, particularly anti-Federalists, would accept the new constitution, Congress approved Madison's amendments without significant debate.

Careful debate at any stage of the process might have given the American people an opportunity to clarify their understanding of the place of free expression in the societies of New World. Instead the peculiar historical circumstances surrounding the adoption of the Bill of Rights resulted in postponement of debate about freedom of the press. By then the libertarian First Amendment was in place. Much of the historical confusion about freedom of expression in America can be traced to this source. Historian Leonard Levy has described the adoption of the First Amendment as "a lucky historical accident."

Second, the early republic must be seen as an experiment in self-government. The revolution discredited one form of social control (British colonial rule) without precisely defining an alternative. In spite of the lucidity of their prose, the Founding Fathers were in fact groping to define the principles—and the ways and means—of a new nation. Naturally, in the first flush of independence, many Americans were intoxicated with the heady program of the Enlightenment. The first decades of the United States experience may be seen as a laboratory in which the principles of the Enlightenment, Old World traditions, and unprecedented circumstances collided. And hark—what discord followed! Fundamental questions were raised, usually in acrimonious controversy: What should be the role of faction or party in America? How should the government in power respond to opposition, particularly scurrilous attacks? What is the proper relationship between newspapers and political parties? Who is the final arbiter of constitutional disputes: states, the legislature, or the Supreme Court?

As questions were debated in the heat of governing, most of the Founding Fathers were content to invoke the formulae of the marketplace principle, while pursuing more constricted policies in practice. In spite of state and national bills of rights, ostensibly insuring free exchange of ideas, virtually all states chose to reestablish the British common law that enabled the government to prosecute the authors—or printers—of seditious libel. In most cases the jury was permitted only to determine whether the defendant was guilty of publication; the judge alone decided whether the act of speech was libelous or permissible. In some states, beginning in 1790, truth was permitted as a defense—a doctrine that had its roots in the 1735 Zenger case—but as often as not this defense was available only in press attacks on government, not on individuals who held political office.



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Four of the men who would never have been President under today's media scrutiny.

Freedom of expression also suffered significant setbacks in the first years of the new republic. In a message to Congress in 1794, President George Washington denounced the Democratic Societies that had sprung up in western Pennsylvania to coordinate protests against the hated whiskey taxes of Alexander Hamilton. Some members of Congress, led by Virginians James Madison, William Giles, and John Nicholas, considered the President's animadversions a violation of the spirit of the First Amendment. Reaction to Washington's address inaugurated American debate about the libertarian principle; in theory England was well ahead of its colonial offspring.

In a period of feverish international tension between the United States and France during the administration of John Adams, the Federalist Congress passed the Alien and Sedition acts (1798), which enabled the government to expel foreign-born undesirables and to prosecute those who published "any false, scandalous and malicious writing" about the government, Congress or the President. Fourteen journalists and printers were indicted under the Sedition Law—all of them partisans of the nascent Republican party, which looked to Jefferson and Madison for leadership. The law's unpopularity precipitated the election of Thomas Jefferson, who pardoned the offenders after he took office in March of 1801. Although the Sedition Law was used solely as a club to crush political opposition, its acceptance of truth as a defense, allowance of greater scope to juries and requirement that criminal intent be proved did represent a significant improvement over common law.

Despite the steady supply of pronouncements on behalf of free speech that issued from his felicitous pen, even Jefferson was so frustrated by admittedly scurrilous attacks on his character during his administration that he suggested, in a letter to Pennsylvania Governor Thomas McKean, in February 1803, that "a few prosecutions of the most eminent offenders would have a wholesome effect in restoring the integrity of the press. Not a general prosecution, for that would look like persecution; but a selected one."

Jefferson believed that the national government had no power to limit freedom of

expression (in this he compares favorably with his predecessors), but he could cheerfully contemplate state-based prosecution under the common law, so long as truth was permitted as a defense. Certainly Jefferson was more committed to free exchange than most Americans of his time, but he showed a Miltonic tendency to reserve unlimited liberty to serious thinkers and writers.

It must be admitted that Jefferson maintained a double standard. Out of power, he was the American champion of the free marketplace of ideas; in fact, he made quasi-secret cash payments to one of the most irresponsible and vituperative hack writers of his time, James Callender. In power the thin-skinned Jefferson was not averse to a few wholesome prosecutions. On the question of press freedom, as in a number of other arenas, Jefferson's achievement was to articulate idealistic principles that he was not always able to uphold in power.

Progress for the concept came from another unlikely source: Alexander Hamilton, who is identified with his distrust of "the rabble." Hamilton, who was practicing law after his retirement from Washington's cabinet, handled the appeal of Harry Croswell, editor of the Federalist mouthpiece, *The Wasp*, who was one of the "wholesome prosecutions" during the Jefferson administration. Croswell had charged — with some truth — that James Callender had been paid by Jefferson to write denunciations of George Washington and John Adams.

Masterful Argument

Hamilton argued that the jury should be empowered to determine whether an alleged libel was criminal and insisted that truth be allowed as a defense. Hamilton's masterful argument helped to lead, one year later, to a New York law that incorporated all of his proposals.

The Founding Fathers lived during a violently partisan era of American political life. The press made little or no attempt to be objective. One historian has called it the dark age of American journalism. Political leaders were routinely abused, in startlingly personal terms, by the opposition press. In the minds of the principal national leaders, these were no routine political contests. Everything was at stake. Jefferson and Hamilton — and their followers — believed they were locked in a struggle for the soul of the new republic. Reasonable men wondered how much opposition a fragile experiment in government could absorb without endangering its survival. Men of principle in both parties found themselves descending to behavior that in theory (and in opposition) they found reprehensible.

The question for citizens of the late 20th Century is not so much, "How free is the press," but rather, "How expensive is a free press?"

The debate continues. In the late 20th Century prior restraint is seldom attempted except where the government believes matters of national security are at stake: e.g., the Pentagon Papers case. Government officials have little recourse in the face of press criticism, even when it is clearly irresponsible and slanderous. Mostly unsuccessful attempts are occasionally made to force journalists to name their sources, but institutions of the press are seldom held accountable for the news they obtain and publish about government.

From the perspective of the historic champions of a free marketplace of ideas, the libertarian model has more or less become orthodoxy in the United States. In this regard the United States compares favorably with other nations, including Great Britain, where prior restraint occasionally rears its head and where the absence of a freedom of information act is sometimes painfully evident.

Americans — children as much of Puritanism as of the Enlightenment — continue to fret over pornography and obscenity, but it is unlikely that any 18th Century gentleman would find the widespread availability of pornographic literature in our time to be evidence of a repressive culture. Recent attempts to curb the grantmaking discretion of the National Endowment for the Arts are more troubling; it seems likely, however, that Thomas Jefferson would see the NEA controversy as a church-state issue rather than a problem of freedom of expression. The contemporary arena for public debate about freedom of expression seems to be the schoolhouse. Americans continue to grapple with the problem of deciding whether to regard high school and college students as incipient adults who therefore deserve to enjoy the full compliment of citizenship rights, or cultural apprentices whose exercises in freedom must be carefully supervised. It is likely that this debate will grow much more lively as we enter the 21st Century.

The triumph of industrialization and capitalism (Hamilton's vision) has fundamentally altered the nature of the debate in our time. The question for citizens of the late 20th Century is not so much, "How free is the press," but rather, "How expensive is a free press?" In Jefferson's time anyone with a modest amount of spare cash could publish pamphlets, broadsheets, electioneering tickets, and newspapers. Although the nation soon settled on two major political parties (the administration and its opposition), a wide range of points of view was available to the people of the new republic. In a sparsely populated, coastal republic, letters were themselves a significant political medium and products of the press were routinely distributed hand to hand, shared between friends, handed about in taverns and coffee houses.

In the last years of the 20th Century the cost of purchasing space or time on existing media of communication is so enormous that the average citizen has been effectively disenfranchised as a participant in the free exchange of ideas. This produces many problems, not the least of which is a narrowing of political discourse, a homogenization of the message. True, less expensive media exist (computer bulletin boards, electronic mail, desktop-produced newsletters), but they have so far played a minuscule role in the nation's political drama. In Alexander Hamilton's mercantilist empire the question is not freedom of expression but access.

Clay Jenkinson is an historian and scholar who frequently represents Thomas Jefferson in educational and dramatic presentations.

Dan Hubig is a freelance illustrator in San Francisco. Reprinted by permission.

BRAVE NEW WORLD:
Rediscovering Democratic Media

Frances Moore Lappé, longtime social critic and author of the pioneering study of food resources, Diet for a Small Planet, *and educator, public policy expert and African-American community activist Paul Martin Du Bois, are co-founders of the Institute for the Arts of Democracy, a resource center for re-examining the role of citizenship and democratic participation in modern society. They are currently writing a book,* Doing Democracy, *that will deal specifically with the difficulty of maintaining avenues of free expression in the age of media conglomerates and will explore alternative means of shaping thought and opinion. They recently talked to* Media&Values' *Editor Rosalind Silver about their work and their conclusions about public discourse in modern society.*

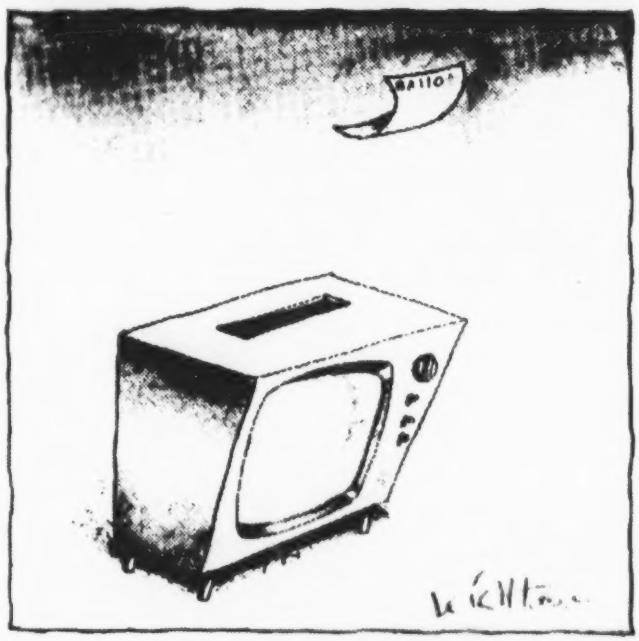
M&V: *Your recent book,* Rediscovering America's Values, *was cast as a dialogue between two different perspectives of American ideals. What do you see as the media's role in ongoing public discourse?*

Lappé: The press—and today, of course, that includes all media—was never conceived as a passive transmitter of neutral information. What we need instead is educated evaluation of issues, accompanied by true communication between various sides in the public debate. A media that truly served the democratic process would facilitate this kind of dialogue, not serve as a one-way conduit for commercially selected information.

I'm continually frustrated that my voice is filtered through the screen of the prevailing view of information as a commodity. We've confused the right to speak with the right to spend. We must change this notion that a voice in the media belongs only to those with money to spend, when it actually belongs to everybody. Instead of protecting that standard, we need to rethink the situation and develop ways to involve all levels of society—whether that means making editorial pages more accessible, helping community access channels develop grassroots programming or making creative use of new media.

M&V: *In other words, you're looking for a change in the prevailing system of rights—almost a right to discourse?*

Lappé: That's a good way of putting it. We have to rethink our whole philosophy about what free speech means. If we put a higher value on direct interchange and diversity, it may mean readjusting our current view that commercial access to the media must be absolute.



M&V: *You mention some remedies that are within the context of the system we have now. Do you have others in mind? How would you change the situation? How would you expand the dialogue?*

Du Bois: So much of the controversy about media's role really deals with the management of oppression, not information. I think we could identify several major remedies that could help us move in the direction of a less oppressive, more democratic media system. We Americans have long held the principle that truth emerges from diversity as a crucial value in democratic discourses which is why free speech is specifically guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. But although Americans honor this value as a founding principle, it's not very well reflected in our current media system, which is currently controlled by an economic elite.

If commercial media gatekeepers—the managers who select and control information—limit diversity of channels, then diversity of voices is also blocked.

Democratizing the media structure itself is the first line of defense against the stranglehold of ever-growing media conglomerates. There are ways, through public policy and private means, to encourage efforts to increase the number of gatekeepers. Satellite systems, computer networks and other "new" media can all be used to expand information flow, thus effectively increasing the number of gatekeepers. Outlets for the transmission of information can also be increased. Right now we are at the beginning of a technological revolution in communication. As we move through its stages, we have at least the potential for increasing the number and variety of channels for diverse voices.

We also need to provide all possible

means of support, both publicly and privately, for sustaining existing media outlets. That is, we can work to reverse or at least halt the trend toward increasing conglomeration. We can insure, as many other countries do, that media outlets presenting minority and diverse viewpoints, presently under siege, continue to exist.

Methods for supporting diversity can range from providing favorable postal rates for alternative publications and supporting community TV and radio access channels,

"Politicians in the Capitol speak with only one voice, the voice of the oligarchy that buys the airline tickets and the television images."

Lewis H. Lapham, *Harper's*

to considering accommodation of diverse opinion as a factor in the broadcast license review process. We must return to the realization that broadcast licensees don't own the airwaves; they only hold them as a public trust.

Why should a few journalists have the privilege of anointing issues for public discussion and deciding whether to treat them seriously or sensationally? Programs and goals need to be open to public judgment and the discourse ought to be a two-way process of discussion, reflection and action. So the question then becomes how can we use the new and old technology to help citizens exchange ideas, to help them interact with each other?

M&V: *How would you bring about such changes? Are you proposing additional standards for broadcast license approval or a new fairness doctrine?*

Du Bois: Those are two options. We can use all the means at our disposal to demand that programming provide voices for people and interactive ways in which they can come together.

We also need to work to alter the power and the influence of media images. This is something that your center is doing. I would define media literacy as knowing how to evaluate messages and thinking critically about the messages that are presented.

How do you democratize the influence of these messages? If you can't protect people from them any longer, the old censorship model must give way to an exciting alternative—changing the way they're interpreted. Individuals, families and groups who understand how messages work can control their effects themselves. Although their scope is still too limited, people are working in these areas.

Lappé: As we talk to audiences and do other work in this area, we try to give people a sense of these altered possibilities—that things don't always have to be the way they are right now. Before they can act, people need to have a taste, a picture, of what a different system would be like, both day-to-day and in terms of longterm goals for the kind of society we all want to live in. They need to feel that their voices can be heard, and that there are means for getting their ideas across.

As we all work on issues we care about, we must take advantage of all possible avenues to expand the debates we're involved in to include a broader spectrum of opinion. We also have to build a commitment toward access that's society-wide, so that it becomes everyone's responsibility. This sounds strange to many Americans, but it's a well-accepted principle in other democracies. Many countries in Western Europe, for example, provide taxpayer support to alternative newspapers.

"The more formal power 'We, the people' acquire, the less actual influence we seem to have."

Daniel Yankelovich, *Kettering Review*

M&V: *Your work emphasizes the idea of diversity of voices in American democracy. Has this principle been mostly an ideal, or do you feel there was a time when we met it better?*

Du Bois: I feel there was a time when we did better, at least in one way, with the public being served by a more diverse and community-centered print media. The percentage of U.S. towns with several daily newspapers has declined from 60 percent in 1910 to under four percent today. There was a time when there was local competition among papers, and those who had access to competing media enjoyed greater choice and diversity than they have now.

Today, on the other hand, we have greater variety among the types of media: computers and satellites, cable television and VCRs, software distribution centers, videotech and teletech, in addition to radio and newspapers and television. But too often their content is repetitive and represents only a common commercial view. We could do more by learning to make better use of the many new media that have the capacity to put people in touch with each other.

Another important point must be made. It's always seemed to me that we have had a kind of media apartheid in this country. As a black person I have to be aware that large portions of the American population have always been excluded from the media. In most cases they have been excluded both from the means of telling their own stories and having their own issues raised, and even from access to the messages of the majority culture. That may be breaking down at this point, but it's still real.

That's why alternative and community media are so important. In radio, for example, the typical decentralization of control may be very positive, because it provides incentives for presenting varying opinions—even controversies. But as with other media, more and more radio stations are linked to national networks. So it becomes more and more difficult for low-income people or representatives of alternative viewpoints to own radio stations and present programs for a low-income or minority population.

I think most Americans think about media in very despairing terms. The companies are larger, the messages seem to be more homogenized, the diversity is less, the media more centralized, but farther away. But the picture is a lot more complex than the standard message of despair.

M&V: *So it's not enough just to point to the total number of media outlets, although that's still an important factor?*
Du Bois: It's a *very* important factor. But you have to remember there's a mixed picture. Because it's not a lost cause. There are still ways for the voices of previously underrepresented people to be heard. Or for programming that contributes to the scope of real democratic discourse. It's not too late.

There are some very interesting things being done. An example is in the Tualatin Valley in Oregon. This relatively isolated area west of Portland has an impressive range of cable channels set aside for such community access and public programming. The mix includes broadcasting of virtually all of the important governmental meetings for 16 towns and small cities, a community bulletin board that features continual displays of public events, a channel for the hearing impaired, three public access channels and two education channels.

What's astonishing about this is that nationwide only one percent of all the programs available on television are public access. Yet in this area, 36 percent of the people in those 16 cities and towns say that they watch programs on those channels and 81 percent watch the educational channels at least occasionally. To me this indicates that when people see that they can find improvements over normal television fare, they participate.

I don't want to single this community out as the ideal model, because needs vary and perhaps even more could be done. But such examples do suggest that Americans are hungering for some serious fare when combined with individual goals and a sense of access.

M&V: *If you could design your own system, which is perhaps what you're trying to do in your book, what would it be like?*
DuBois: What's crucial is variety and diversity in the ownership and control of all media so all the strata of society would be represented in developing programming and information to fits each group's needs. There would be active participation of a very broad spectrum of society in the development of public discourse and public policy.

There would be, next, the active participation of the media in helping diverse interests create their messages, find their voices and distribute their messages to other parts of the society. And finally there would be, I think, the widespread media literacy that applies when people can evaluate and control the messages they are sent. Then I think we could say that media are under democratic control instead of the so-called form of democracy that gives this responsibility to the commercial media.

"I never hear the voice of the scientist, the writer, the athlete, the teacher, the plumber, the police officer..."

Lewis H. Lapham, *Harper's*

Lappé: The real question is how we can begin moving in the direction of media that truly express the questions people need to answer about their lives. Changing our understanding of media goals is crucial, but this can begin in relatively small ways.

For example, we recently visited an alternative radio station in Dallas. The day we were there it featured a black woman doctor giving detailed, on-air instruction on how to conduct breast self-examination. This seemingly unusual subject was actually a very important service for a group of listeners, many of whom may have been without proper medical care or health insurance. It was an impressive example of tailoring programming to the needs of the audience.
Du Bois: It's really not a matter of how Frances or I or any small group of people feel about this, but rather how we can provide the opportunity for many people to create their own visions and have them realized. That's really what we're talking about when we're talking about democratization of the media. It's not a vision of a specific type of ownership structure or programming.

M&V: *But to do that we need both skills and access—and examples.*
Du Bois: But prior to that we need to know that the future is not simply bleak. A lot of people say, "You're talking about democracy—that's all well and good, but it's too late. There is a small group of people who have dominated everything." That's not quite the case yet. It doesn't have to be.
Lappé: There actually seems to be a substantial backlash against media manipulation. What we need to do is to tap it.
Du Bois: We're going to see this all through the summer and all through the election—the questioning of the media's ability to determine the issue of the day. The current process tends to emphasize the importance of the journalist. It requires prompt answers, it requires someone who appears unflappable, the management of a visual impression. Wouldn't it be fascinating, however, if the millions of ordinary people who identified with the plainspoken, plain-appearing Paul Tsongas, might in fact make it possible to someday create a political process that isn't connected with telegenic, message-controlling, charismatic-appearing, mediagenic candidates?

Perhaps some of us ordinary folk could raise the issues and question the candidates. People could get on line and talk to them. This is possible; there's absolutely nothing that prevents us from doing that.

M&V: *So people need more ideas about how to make this change?*
Du Bois: When people can ask their own questions, they know what's important to them. In a journalistic interview, on the other hand, the most fatal mistake that any candidate can make is to give the impression of not having the right answers.

So they concentrate on images, instead of honestly sitting down with the media and saying, "Hey, we're grownups. We can handle complexities; we can handle bad news. Let's talk about the real problems we see every time we walk out the front door and into the street. Let's stop fooling around. Let's talk about the issues affecting the quality of our lives and the future of our children."

M&V: *So you feel there's a hunger for information waiting to be tapped?*
Du Bois: Clearly, there's a hunger on the far left, there's a hunger on the right, there's hunger in the middle. In some people despair leads to paralysis. Actually, it should lead to analysis, reflection—and action. Why wallow in despair when we can begin to change things?

MAKING POLITICS WORK:
Journalists and the Public Share Responsibility

By Jay Rosen

Roger Ailes, media advisor to presidents Reagan and Bush, once told a reporter: "You get up every morning and try to figure out how to humiliate my client. I get up every morning and try to figure out how to make him look good. I sleep better."

The point Ailes wanted to make — that he deserves to sleep better than most reporters — may be questionable. As a public relations expert, however, he does enjoy an advantage over most reporters in his understanding of his task and how it relates to public opinion. Ailes can go to sleep at night knowing what success looks like. For him, it means his client's victory, to which he wants every citizen to contribute.

Journalists, by contrast, are less clear about what success means for them. Especially since the era of the Vietnam War and Watergate, they define themselves *against* others: They see themselves as government watchdogs, tough questioners of evasive officials, dedicated opponents of professionals like Ailes, who try to manipulate the news. This is a useful self-image, but it is also a negative one. The adversarial stance encourages the press to be relentlessly skeptical but it does not offer an uplifting public goal, a positive cause citizens can share with journalists. So when the press "wins" it's usually because the negative functions of journalism, criticism and exposure, have won out.

Scandals as Triumph?

In his memoir of the 1988 campaign, *See How They Run*, reporter Paul Taylor of the *Washington Post* describes his reaction after Gary Hart withdrew from the race (in part because of information the *Post* had about the candidate's alleged extramarital affairs). Taylor recalls that he felt "relieved, then triumphant" at Hart's withdrawal. Both feelings — relief and triumph — would be understandable to his fellow journalism professionals. But did the rest of us see the Hart scandal as a "triumph"? Was Gary Hart's humiliation—or the adultery charges that swirled around Bill Clinton at the beginning of the 1992 primary season — a great achievement for American democracy? For civility in public life? For anyone else but people in the media?

There is some truth, then, in the commonly voiced complaint that the news media is "too negative." But what's excessively negative is not the content of the news, as critics usually charge; it is the journalist's self-conception, in which the highest achievement is often to bring others down. Of course, we cannot ask the press to climb aboard the cause of one candidate or other; to ignore controversy about community issues, or to assist the efforts of interest groups. Such commitments will always be seen as inappropriate for a press that is supposed to serve the broad public interest.

If not candidates or causes, what is it that the press can legitimately support? If being "against" isn't good enough, what should journalists be "for" when they report on politics and public life? The answer depends on our definition of politics. This is intellectual territory journalists rarely enter. They are not inclined to ask themselves what they

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WHO ARE YOU PLANNING TO VOTE FOR?
I'VE REALLY ONLY HEARD ABOUT THAT ONE GUY, UH, CLINTON. WHO ELSE IS RUNNING?
POLLS SHOW CLINTON EARLY FRONTRUNNER
WITH CLINTON THE CLEAR FRONT RUNNER AND ALL OTHER DEMOCRATS SEEMINGLY INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM EACH OTHER, YOU WOULD VOTE FOR WHOM?
UH... DO YOU WANT ME TO SAY CLINTON?
POLLS SAY CLINTON UNSTOPPABLE
NOW THAT CLINTON HAS ESSENTIALLY WON THE NOMINATION, LEAVING YOUR VOTE ALL BUT MEANINGLESS, WHAT WILL YOU BE DOING ON PRIMARY DAY?
MEANINGLESS?
POLLS ANTICIPATE ALARMINGLY LOW VOTER TURNOUTS

mean—and what they should mean—when they speak of the political sphere. Often, I think, the working definition goes something like this: matters become "political" (in the journalist's mind) when they begin to involve the business of winning votes, trading favors, fighting for support and defeating rivals. Politics, in other words, is a competitive struggle, akin to the battles that go on in a large corporation, where talented and ambitious people try to fight their way to the top. When we use the phrase "office politics" to refer to these intramural wars, we employ the precise meaning of "politics" that appeals to most journalists.

But is this the right way to understand the term? Definitions are more than words: They are deeds of mind, and like all deeds they have consequences. Historian and social critic Christopher Lasch has criticized the tendency to regard politics as "another name for warfare." Among the consequences of this line of thinking may be the prevailing idea that "politics" has nothing to do with the search for truth or enduring values. Instead it becomes "the rule of the strongest" (or the one with the most votes), a "shouting match that drowns out the voice of reason," as Lasch puts it.

Here is a vision of politics guaranteed to repel most citizens. And yet it is a vision we routinely see in the news media—in TV coverage of rival abortion demonstrations, in the mudslinging on panel shows like *The McLaughlin Group* or *Crossfire*, in the mechanically "balanced" news story that quotes environmentalists saying one thing and industry representatives saying exactly the opposite. When politics is portrayed as a shouting match between embittered rivals who agree on nothing, citizens are encouraged to withdraw from the scene entirely, to retreat into apathy, cynicism and the comfort of blanket statements like "politics doesn't affect me" or "they're all liars and crooks." Without quite realizing it, journalists play a part in shaping these corrosive attitudes. They contribute by viewing politics as "another name for warfare," a form of ritualized combat in which their assignment is to review the tactics and expose the self-interested claims of the various players. In the process they tend to become cynical observers of a game they assume has only one purpose: to separate winners from losers.

Public relations sees publicity as a God-given right, and upholds a positive image for ourselves as the legitimate goal of public speech. Those who practice public relations assume that the truth will take care of itself, that no special commitment on their part is needed.

What, then, might be a better definition of politics? Suppose we decide that "politics" is not about winning elections, or struggling for power, or administering the offices of the state. We might define it instead as a kind of knowledge—a public way of knowing. Politics is the means by which a democracy comes to know its problems, its aims, its place in time, its inner divisions, its fundamental beliefs — itself.

If "We, the people" are to be our own governors, then "we" must continually discover who "we" have become, what "we" want, where "we" as a society are going. Politics is the means by which we can make these discoveries, and events like the presidential campaign should serve that end. As the philosopher Michael Sandel describes it, "when politics goes well, we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone."

If this is the true purpose of democratic politics — to discover through common endeavor what none of us could ever know alone — then the journalist's function can be described positively rather than neutrally or negatively. Journalists, in this view, are not scorekeepers, watchdogs or clerks of fact. Their job is not to remain "objective" or to be everyone's adversary. Instead, their task is to help make politics "go well," as Sandel puts it. Using whatever influence they have, they must try to create the conditions that permit us to gain the common knowledge we need.

Public Discourse

But what are these conditions? Many of them have to do with the kind of discourse that prevails in politics. The sort of talk a democracy needs has certain characteristics: First, it is open and understandable to all; it deals with major problems affecting society; it is conducted in a civil fashion, (meaning that differences can be registered, conflict can occur, without destroying the basis for further discussion); it protects private and intimate matters from the glare of the public realm. At its best, such talk illuminates our troubles and connects them to broader issues. We can call this sort of dialogue "public" discourse, to be distinguished from other forms of conversation that merely occur *in* public—commercial hype, official stonewalling, celebrity gossip, insider chit-chat, technical mumbo-jumbo, etc.

Journalists, then, have a responsibility to practice truly "public" discourse; indeed, they should be role models for the rest of us in the way they speak about politics. They should uphold the standards of public discourse when they interview public officials, when they discuss the political sphere among themselves, when they think about what's worth covering. They should respect those who are willing to enter into public dialogue, and reward them with media coverage. Indeed, I would go further. The press should demonstrate an open "bias" toward a certain kind of talk—the sort of engaged and open discussion that permits us to "know in common what we cannot know alone." They should believe in the importance of such talk, and seek out opportunities to sponsor it. They should make it their primary value.

Journalists should be role models for the rest of us in the way they speak about politics.

But are we willing to let them? It is

common for those of us outside the media to complain about media "bias." Professors do it in their classes and publications. Politicians do it when they want to win and the media coverage they're getting doesn't seem to be helping. Corporations do it when a story develops in a way that works against their interests. Various ethnic groups do it in complaining about their image in the news media. Both the right and the left have their own media-monitoring groups, which hunt down examples of bias from both sides of the political spectrum.

These complaints are often justified. There is plenty of bias in the media, which, after all, is a powerful institution staffed by fallible human beings. And yet it is interesting how rarely we turn the question of bias on ourselves. We ask journalists to be objective, to be fair, to remain detached, but when it's our turn to speak publicly, we often feel justified in putting the best possible face on things. We don't think about such values as detachment and objectivity when it comes time to defend our own interests, or win our own political battles. Our public discourse is full of bias, and many would say that this is entirely proper. But if politics is to be more than "another name for warfare;" then political talk must be more than the pursuit of personal, group or corporate interests.

The truth is that when it comes to public discourse, everyone has responsibilities. We each have a responsibility to pay attention to important issues, even if they grow difficult or complex. We have an obligation to uphold certain standards of civility and mutual respect in public speech. We are all responsible for acknowledging inconvenient facts, even though they may weaken our case. We must learn to give up a profitable line of argument when it remains profitable but ceases to be true. We have a responsibility to say what has become politically unsayable, if the unsayable, in fact, deserves to be said. We must recognize that the attention of the community is a limited resource, and should not be squandered once obtained. And we have a responsibility to use words carefully, lest we lose their meaning.

Finally, we have a responsibility to regard the truth, not as our exclusive possession, but as something to be found in other's arguments, as well — indeed, as something to be produced through dialogue and discussion. When journalists enforce these responsibilities on public speakers, they are doing us a valuable service. When we adhere to such responsibilities ourselves we are doing our part to make democratic politics go well.

Mis-shapen Images

There's a term for the general abandonment of our duty to engage in public discourse. The term is public relations. Public relations is not so much a profession as it is an attitude. It sees publicity as a God-given right, and upholds a positive image for ourselves as the legitimate goal of public speech. Those who practice public relations assume that the truth can take care of itself, that no special commitment on their part is needed.

When politics is portrayed as a shouting match between embittered rivals, citizens are encouraged to withdraw from the scene.

American corporations have long made this assumption. They feel free to practice public relations with a vengeance. But now they are concerned about a particular truth. They want all of us to realize that, if schools continue to decay, the American economy will continue to decline. They're right about that. But they also want to retain their right to bombard our young people with seductive commercials, making the job of schools that much tougher. Can they have it both ways? They think so. But if they were to engage in truly public discourse they would give up this notion, and acknowledge their own role in exacerbating the education problem.

Corporations aren't unique, of course, in their desire to have it both ways. Elected officials, community groups, trade associations, political parties, spokesmen for the left and the right—all want to get their messages out. All seek favorable publicity. All desire to manipulate the media. All want the media to be fair (but sometimes "being fair" means being fair *to them*).

These attitudes are not unreasonable. Everyone's right to try to influence a free press is part of the meaning of having one. But if the cynicism of the journalist has become a corrosive element in our political culture — and I would assert that it has — then we should be willing to consider the causes of that cynicism.

Certainly one of the causes is the separate standards journalists are asked to live by. While they observe the rest of us committed to public relations, they know they should — and generally they do — seek a disinterested truth.

There is often an arrogance in this feeling of separateness, since journalists are surely not the only ones committed to truth in politics. But there is also some justification. The public relations mentality is an American addiction, a way of loading the media with responsibilities that other interest groups refuse to accept themselves. We cannot continue to live by the code of public relations and expect journalists to abandon their code of cynicism, detachment and mistrust. Nor can we continue to batter the media with charges of bias and expect them to acknowledge their responsibility to make politics go well.

Like public school teachers, journalists are designated by the rest of us to carry out an educational function. And like school teachers, they need to be left alone to do their jobs. We should recognize journalists' right to exercise their own judgment independent of our particular demands. But just as school teachers should, while enjoying their autonomy, be in favor of good schools and work hard to bring them about, journalists should, while enjoying their independence, be in favor of a political system that works. They should try to bring such a system about, especially by improving the quality of public discussion and the process of public debate. But if we want them to accept this obligation — and we should — then we must accept it equally ourselves. Ultimately, then, improving the media means improving the conduct of our entire public life.

Jay Rosen is an assistant professor of journalism at New York University and a media critic whose work has appeared in Harper's, The Nation, The New York Times, Tikkun, *and other journals.*

Kirk Anderson is a freelance cartoonist and illustrator in Wisconsin.

THE PARADOX OF POLITICAL ADS:
Reform Depends on Voter Savvy

By Kathleen Jamieson

In 1988 I studied the information absorbed by 100 people during a season of presidential campaign news and advertising.

I conducted focus groups, talked to individuals about their recollections of the campaign and observed their reactions throughout. About halfway through the process I realized that what these typical voters were learning from the news and political advertising they saw was everything they needed to know not to be voters, but to be campaign consultants.

TV viewers understood, for example, that George Bush's ad about prison furloughs was designed to make Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis look "soft on crime."

But they didn't know what either candidate planned to do about crime, homelessness, economic policy, the environment or other major issues of the day. A major crisis such as the savings and loan bailout—one of the most expensive giveaways in U.S. history—was ongoing at the time but never seriously debated.

Instead of a discussion of issues, voters were treated to analyses of polls and polling, gaffes and media gurus, media buying requirements and inside information on campaign staffing shake-ups. Still worse, broadcast news and much print journalism focused on the strategic intent of misleading ads but not their accuracy, fairness or relevance to governance.

The most analyzed and talked about image of the campaign completely sidestepped the question of what either major candidate would do if elected president. Known as the "furlough ad," it depended on innuendo and visual images to link Michael Dukakis with the supposed dangers of a prison furlough program and therefore with a dangerous breed of liberalism.

When the announcer's voice intoned "many first-degree murderers escaped" as the words "268 escaped" appeared on the screen, the human need for closure caused viewers to associate the number 268 with the word "many," encouraging them to assume that many prisoners committed crimes while on furlough. Furloughed prisoner William Horton's name was never mentioned. It didn't have to be. Reporters mentioned it often as did Bush in network soundbites. With those soundbites came Horton's menacing mug shot.

Courtesy of CAMPAIGN Magazine. Reprinted by permission.

Campaign managers could also depend on political reporters to find and publicize the story of the one prisoner who assualted and raped while on furlough. And they could expect audiences to draw desired false inferences from an ad that was not technically incorrect: First-degree murderers did, in fact, escape. Four did. And of those four, only one—Horton—committed a violent crime. In a 10-year period, 268 prisoners escaped, which meant that Massachusetts had the best record of the industrial states. Other facts about the program—its purpose, its duration, the number of prisoners released, the screening process—were also obscured.

Most obscure of all was the basic unfairness of judging Michael Dukakis' fitness to be president on the basis of the "facts" presented in this ad. The president, after all, cannot change the furlough programs in the states. And it is the states and localities, not the federal government, that are responsible for crime prevention anyway.

This brand of unfair editing can be traced straight back to the '30s, but it gained prominence in a campaign ad from the Kennedy-Nixon race of 1960. In a Kennedy effort, pictures of Nixon nodding his head from the campaign's televised debates were used to make it appear that Nixon agreed with the Kennedy program.

But inevitably, suspect claim-making didn't work. In 1964, the Goldwater campaign created its own backlash with a 30-minute campaign film that contrasted such images as cleancut, smiling children saying the pledge of allegiance (representing the Republicans) with scenes of supposed Democratic immorality and decadence. Because the juxtaposition was too obvious, the film became a *cause celebre*, and the Johnson campaign ended up using it as one of its own campaign documents.

Nevertheless, the lesson was learned: Rapid intercutting of visuals can short-circuit the normal logic of viewers' thought processes. Viewers are also slow to recognize that most ads feature actors and are highly sophisticated marketing tools using professional directors and the latest high-tech editing techniques. As viewers, we react mainly to their emotional content.

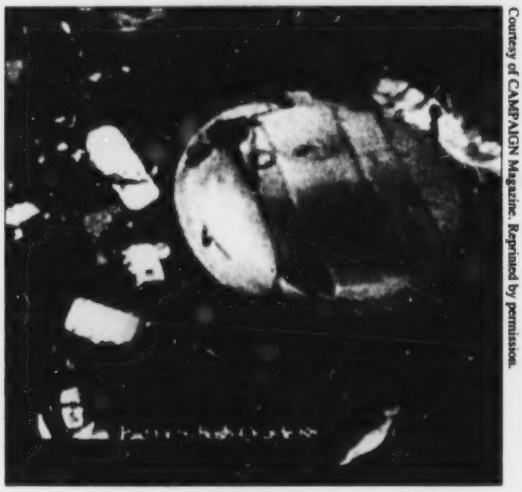
Although viewers are often knowledgeable about why campaign advertising and marketing stress particular themes, this form of media sophistication is very different from the kind of media awareness or media literacy that defuses the impact of emotionally manipulative ads. Partly this gap arises because most criticism of advertising is verbal, while the ads themselves are visual.

When the visuals disagree with the narration, people tend to base their assumptions on the visuals. But in correcting ads, reporters focus their attention on what is *said*, not what is shown.

Some other 1988 campaign ads demonstrate this seeming paradox:

• An anti-Bush Dukakis commercial associated the Republican candidate with cuts in the social security system. As a senator, George Bush did actually vote for a freeze in social security cost of living adjustments (not actual cuts). A visual showing a social security card being torn up associated him with massive cuts.

• Scenes of a polluted harbor linked Dukakis with Boston harbor problems. Such visuals are absorbed by viewers who can't tell where the pollution shown originated. In fact, the Boston Harbor ad was effective in creating doubts about how the mildly pro-environment Dukakis would stack up against the arguably less environmentally aware record of his opponent.



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Which brings us to the question: How effective is political advertising?

Studies of political ads show that they can make a difference in close elections. But their influence is complex and can operate in peculiar ways. One often-ignored factor is political advertising's importance as a source of political information. For people who don't seek out other forms of political information—the very voters whose response to ads is greatest—the effect of political advertising is magnified. It may be even more important in state and local races where other forms of political information are less available.

Almost no piece of communication has what is called a "direct effect," a measurable change in behavior based on one exposure. But the effectiveness of political advertising is based not on one viewing but on many. Much research has shown that repetition can predispose a viewer or listener toward an ad's assumptions.

In 1988, one out of four voters told pollsters that their voting decisions had been influenced by advertising. When you combine these reactions with many voters' lack of exposure to other political information and the manipulative nature of many ads, the consequences are disturbing.

If we take it as a given—as I do—that an electorate possessing accurate information about the things its members value is necessary for democratic functioning, we have to be concerned when political advertising is misleading and when it drives out other forms of communication.

What's the remedy? A number of other democracies restrict the campaign process in various ways to minimize the impact of manipulative ads or promote substantive debate on the issues. But such regulations would represent a revolution in our free speech traditions and the system of commercial access for political ads.

Advertising-savvy journalists can help by following a "news grammar" that avoids media manipulation by campaign managers. Correcting the claims of unfair ads, and hard questions about advertising's relevance to how candidates propose to govern, can help. But some ads are so insidious that their impact defies journalistic caution.

Ultimately the true remedy must come from the voters themselves. TV viewers need to take a hard look at political advertising, the ordinary as well as the blatant. If campaign managers recognize that substance is what sells, they will be forced to provide it. Voters must demand that candidates answer real questions about themselves and their lives. Only then will they cease to be political campaign managers and become instead informed determiners of their country's future.

Kathleen Jamieson is dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania/Philadelphia. She is a widely recognized authority on political advertising and the author of several books on political ads and their effects. Her most recent book on the subject, Dirty Politics, *will be published by Oxford University Press in Fall 1992.*

Re:Action

First Alert System: How to Short-Circuit Misleading Advertising

1. ***Be informed.*** Because it enhances the ability to evaluate campaign advertising knowing what goes on in the body politic is the best protection against misleading communication of all kinds.

2. ***Watch for counter advertising.*** A responsibility of the candidates and their supporters, well-planned and produced responses to unfair attacks have a good chance of reaching the same low-involvement, inadvertently exposed audience that has been influenced by other ads. But — they require money and expertise that may not be equally available to both sides.

3. ***Watch debates.*** Although often criticized for shallow questions and self-serving answers, debates do provide a televised opportunity for viewers to hear candidates' arguments' face-to-face. When candidates are willing to take the risk, they also provide a forum for making opponents responsible for unfair political advertising.

4. ***Watch the news.*** Political analysts do serve a watchdog role over unfair political advertising. Some drawbacks: Their criticisms usually only air once while ads appear repeatedly; most vulnerable viewers may not follow news programs; critics may give additional exposure to unfair criticisms; and commentary may not be as visually evocative and effective as the ads themselves.

NOT A BANG, BUT A WHIMPER:

Citizens Want to Participate But the Media's Roar Drowns Out Their Voices

By Wally Bowen

Philadelphia in 1776 was a city of 35,000 people with a half dozen or so weekly or bi-weekly newspapers. Voices in the "marketplace of ideas" proliferated. Citizen free speech was boisterous.

Citizen "correspondents" expressed their views at length in print via the city's accessible and affordable commercial printers. Citizens also had ample opportunities to voice opinions in the political discussions of town hall and tavern.

Two centuries and a communications revolution later, America's marketplace of ideas is louder and noisier than ever, but the voices of citizens have been pushed to the margin by large, capital-intensive communication systems run by media professionals.

Though journalists are schooled in the rhetoric of serving the "public interest," the networks and publishers for whom they work are in the business of serving private interests—advertisers and stockholders. The work of even the most public-spirited journalist, therefore, is circumscribed by the cultural and economic practices of the daily "business" of journalism.

In this era of corporate journalism, citizen speech is either confined to letters to the editor or carefully packaged and labeled in public opinion polls. Responses which do not fit into polling categories are simply discarded, or placed into the never-never land of "other." In the words of veteran pollster Patrick Caddell, public opinion polling "defines politics and politicians to suit those who are already in power."

To see how much citizen speech has been curtailed in recent years, look at the average American city or town of today. Most have only one daily newspaper. The main avenue of citizen access to the daily newspaper is the letter to the editor, which is often limited to 300 words or less. In Asheville, North Carolina, home of Citizens for Media Literacy, writers of opinion letters must wait 30 days after publication of one letter before submitting another.

Local television news, often limited to 22 minutes plus commercials, is little more than a headline service, with most of the newscast devoted to "soft" news, weather and sports. With the Reagan-era repeal of the Fairness Doctrine and "broadcasting in the public interest" guidelines, citizen viewpoints on local TV consist mainly of an occasional five or 10-second sound bite.

Meanwhile, the national conversation is dominated by the homogeneous fare of the four major TV networks—ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC—plus TV derivatives such as *USA Today*. A typical network TV newscast, for all its high-tech graphics and sound, delivers less information than can be found on the front page columns of the average daily newspaper.

The marketplace of ideas is further restricted by the heavy reliance of news organizations on a relatively narrow range of policy "experts," political insiders, and opinion-leaders. Studies such as the University of Minnesota's *News Shapers* survey and Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting's study of guests appearing on the *MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour* and *Nightline* have shown that the overwhelming majority of news sources and commentators are white, male and current or former government officials.

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"The practice of politics today is such that citizens no longer feel just discouraged, they believe that they are actually denied access to politics. Americans are not apathetic — but they do feel impotent when it comes to politics."

Richard C. Harwood, *Citizens and Politics: A View From Main Street*

Meanwhile, media and political elites wring their hands over what they perceive to be "voter apathy." Yet citizens complain that "the avenues for expressing their views are window dressing, not serious attempts to hear the public," according to a recent Kettering Foundation study entitled *Citizens and Politics: A View from Main Street.*

Compare this dilemma of American democracy to the current democratic movements in Europe and Latin America. While these movements are "fired by a vision of citizens as actors in the drama of history," notes public TV commentator Bill Moyers, "what we get in America is the continuing monopoly of experts and insiders—professional communicators in advertising, public relations, lobbying and the media—packaging and promoting ideas in an effort to engineer consent of the governed."

This was not the experience of American citizens during the nation's first 100 years. For example, the average voter turnout in the last quarter of the 19th Century was 77 percent, according to historian T.J. Jackson Lears of Rutgers University. Newspapers of the 19th Century—typically supported by political parties and subscribers—had strong partisan points of view. Citizen interest in politics was marked by audiences' ability to sit for hours and listen to political debate.

The great wave of mergers at the turn of the century, however, loosened newspapers' ties to political parties. Newspapers of the early 20th Century were becoming corporate enterprises dependent on advertising revenues. Journalism was becoming a "profession" based on the pseudo-science of "objectivity"—the belief that all hint of bias could be removed from reporting. This new objectivity allowed newspapers to appeal to an even larger pool of potential advertisers.

Newspapering, once a means for mobilizing citizen participation in the political process, was fast becoming the means for mobilizing consumers on behalf of advertisers of goods and services. The culture of advertising was also changing political discourse itself. Quick and catchy slogans replaced the traditional "stemwinder" political speech. The practice of citizenship was shifting from committed action to passive spectatorship.

The "de-activation" of the American citizenry began in earnest in the 1930s, when business and political elites feared the rise of populist movements and organized labor, according to Lears and other scholars.

Responding to the excesses of monopolistic capitalism and suffering from the effects of the Great Depression, citizens were poised to return to the streets to express their political will. One method for dealing with this populist potential, writes Lears, was the public opinion poll, which was pioneered and perfected by former advertising executive George Gallup.

Gallup called his poll a "sampling referendum," which he claimed allowed "the people, having heard the debate on both sides of every issue, [to] express their will.

Reaching for the Common Good

As one of the founders of the growing "Common Good" movement, philosopher, author and social activist Robert Bellah has been a prime exponent of the need to tackle personal and public problems from the context of a community based on moral and spiritual values. These connections transform the interplay between self-interest, democracy and politics.

In a recent interview with journalist Bill Moyers, Bellah spoke of interdependence and the failure of personal freedom and technological advances to provide meaningful solutions to social ills. The following excerpts deal specifically with the current political situation.

"Americans are allergic to politics. We see it as an area of power and influence unfairly exercised. We have to recover a more classical notion of politics as the place where we decide together about the things we need to do...

"Part of the problem is [television]. Television is such a powerful way of presenting immediate images that it tempts the politician to go for whatever will have the most immediate impact and corrupts the electorate into thinking about voting only in terms of the most short-term interests or fears...

"If a public official is only thinking about his or her own interests and not about whatever entity that public official is supposed to serve, we think that is a corrupt official. By the same token, a voter who goes to the polls and asks which candidate is best for me [without caring] about which is best for the country or for other people, that is a corrupt voter. Just as corrupt as a corrupt political official."

For information about ordering a copy of this interview, see Resources, page 23.

—David Ruth, editorial assistant

Media Activism: A North Carolina Success Story

Citizens for Media Literacy was founded in mid-1991 as a grassroots organization designed to promote citizen participation and access to the media in the Asheville, North Carolina area.

Its activities throughout the region have demonstrated the potential impact of creatively planned media awareness projects. Some of these projects include:

- Publication of *Selling Chemicals to Kids*, an editorial exposé of the impact of tobacco and alcohol advertising on young people. Its distribution in local newspapers and to public health officials resulted in widespread media interviews and coverage throughout this longtime tobacco-growing region.
- Sponsorship of a billboard featuring the U.S. Surgeon General's warning about the dangers of smoking by pregnant women. It was displayed in a minority neighborhood on the same billboard that for years carried cigarette advertisements.
- Publicizing the once-in-five-year opportunity for local citizens to challenge North and South Carolina TV license renewals.
- Notifying local communities with municipally-owned power systems of the possibility of operating their own cable TV systems through already existing wiring.
- Sponsorship of forums and conferences on media issues, including a recent series entitled *Whose First Amendment Is It Anyway?* on citizen First Amendment rights and responsibilities.

After one hundred and fifty years we return to the town meeting. This time the whole nation is within the doors." While Gallup's "town meeting" allusion serves well as a democratic metaphor, as democratic practice it was a disaster. The opinion poll was designed not to sample public opinion but to *master* it.

Writing in the April 1992 issue of *Harper's* magazine, Christopher Hitchens, the magazine's Washington editor, notes that "pollsters, in effect wield the gavel at the town meeting—framing a question to limit, warp, or actually guarantee the answer...Polls are deployed only when they might prove *useful*—that is, helpful to the powers that be in their quest to maintain their position and influence."

Since polls are incapable of "asking an intelligent question or recording a thoughtful answer," he adds, their widespread use greatly limits political discourse. "And, as all pollsters will tell you privately, the answers to poll questions are very greatly influenced by what has lately been defined as important by the television news." TV news, in turn, heavily relies on polls to determine the direction of its coverage. The wheel goes round and round...and public opinion gets flattened.

Moreover, when the public is clearly set against government policy, the mass media assist in rendering popular opinion irrelevant, argues Hitchens, citing the case of public opposition to Ronald Reagan's policy of aid to the Nicaraguan Contras.

During 1983-86, when aid to the Contras was being debated, public opinion remained a steady two to one against the administration policy. The *New York Times Index*, however, shows only .6 percent of the 2,148 *Times* news stories during the period reflected this widespread critical viewpoint. Similarly, only five references to the polls appeared in headlines of *Times* stories about Nicaragua.

"On one of the biggest and least popular policy campaigns of the Reagan Administration, public opinion simply was not an issue," writes Hitchens. "When what 'we' think jibes with the official and commissioning temperature-takers, we hear about it. Otherwise we don't get to know our own minds."

This muffling of the public voice does not have to be terminal. There are ways around it. There's a term in medical science called "collateralization." It's a power of the human body to find alternative pathways when main arteries or neural pathways become constricted or blocked. This is the challenge facing the body politic in America today.

Signs are appearing that suggest the body politic is coming to life and seeking alternative pathways: the use of toll-free telephone numbers by presidential mavericks Jerry Brown and Ross Perot, the dramatic rise in radio and TV call-in shows, the spread of computer networks and bulletin boards, the explosion of new publications using desktop publishing and the use of video recorders by citizen "newshounds."

At times like these, we can take heart from an admonition I remember seeing as a kid on the banner of a small southern newspaper: "It is better to light one small candle than to sit and curse the darkness."

Wally Bowen is executive director of Citizens for Media Literacy, a media activism and education organization based in Asheville, North Carolina.

Peter Kohlsaat is a syndicated cartoonist/freelance illustrator in Minneapolis.

Re:Action

Use Media to Re-enter the Political Process

What can citizens do to regain access to the political process? One approach is to recognize that there's energy in discontent...and that energy is ripe for mobilization. One of the most powerful democratic practices in the era of desktop publishing is compiling a mailing list of like-minded people. Multiply your efforts through networking.

Then take action: Here are some suggested actions from Citizens for Media Literacy:

• Create a "vision" for your community. What would your community be like if citizen activism approached the levels of the Populist Era in the late 19th Century? Use the spirit and practice of the American Revolution as a baseline for comparison and inspiration. Don't be shy about reclaiming the spirit of American patriotism in the service of opening up the political process. Citizen activists need to reclaim the flag from professional politicians!

• Be prepared to start small and steel yourself for the long haul. Get young people involved by lobbying for a revitalization of your public school's "citizenship" curriculum. Work through curriculum coordinators, school librarians and individual teachers to link "media literacy" skills with "citizenship" skills. Raise issues such as more open voter registration laws or whether or not citizens should boycott opinion polls.

• Survey your local media environment. What venues exist for expression of citizen viewpoints? What portion of your newspaper's opinion page is devoted to local, citizen viewpoints? Meet with your local editors and argue that expanding their letters to the editor section will increase circulation. Cite the findings of *Citizens and Politics: A View from Main Street*. Call the Kettering Foundation at (800)221-3657 for a free copy.

CML's media environment survey turned up two radio call-in shows we didn't know about. Talk radio is one of that medium's fastest-growing program formats, further evidence that there's money to be made in providing ways for citizens to speak out.

• If your community has a public access channel on the local cable TV system, lobby for the broadcast of local government meetings and policy hearings on the channel. If your community doesn't have public access, get to work lobbying for an access channel. Don't be put off by claims that "nobody will watch it." Officials in Plymouth, Minnesota, a Minneapolis suburb, estimate that about 4,000 citizens regularly watch its city council meetings.

• Use desktop publishing to expand the venues for citizen viewpoints. Publish the results of your media environment survey in your local alternative newspaper. If you don't have an alternative newspaper, consider starting one. Start a newsletter, even if it's just the back and front of a single sheet of paper.

Though Citizens for Media Literacy is less than a year old, we have started our own newsletter, *The New Citizen*. Its stated goal on the masthead is "Promoting Citizenship in the Age of Mass Media." For a free subscription, call CML at (704)255-0182 or write us at 38 1/2 Battery Park Avenue, Asheville, N.C. 28801.

—Wally Bowen

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Around the World:

TELEVISION CAMPAIGNING VARIES WIDELY

By Howard Frederick

Move over, U.S.A. Elections '92 is more than an American show. Throughout the world from Austria to Zambia, people are electing their leaders. But the big story in many countries is often not the candidates but rather how television intrudes on the democratic process, especially debates and campaign advertising.

We take for granted the staged nature of the televised debates broadcast in the United States. Television personalities invite the candidates, ask the questions, and are as concerned about their own egos and ratings as they are about giving the public the information it needs for reasoned decision-making. With briefing books and image managers in the wings, political candidates seek to exude more personality than substance in U.S. TV debates. Spin doctors then massage the direct hits, the glanced blows and the near misses into virtually unrecognizable forms, legitimizing some candidates and casting others into disfavor.

But most U.S. viewers fail to realize that the format and procedures used in setting up American televised debates are unique. Although media democracy is now a worldwide phenomenon, standards for political advertising and campaign coverage vary widely.

To get a sense of these differences, I used PeaceNet and the Usenet computer networks to distribute a questionnaire on worldwide practices and requirements for TV debates and campaign advertising, use of alternative media and TV dominance to communication researchers and area specialists. Analysis of the 100 responses made it clear that Americans can learn a lot from other countries by examining how they "do" TV democracy.

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Televised Debates

No country requires televised debates. In fact, they are the exception rather than the rule in worldwide terms. In China—the country with the largest population—there are no debates since there are no real elections. As in most Eastern European countries during the period of the *ancien regime*, the number of candidates proposed by the Chinese government often equals the number of offices that are open.

Sri Lanka is a nominal democracy but its voters never see televised debates. Candidates accuse each other before their supporters but never confront each other on TV or in person. In Mexico, televised debates are a recent innovation since the ruling party governs access to the airwaves. One oft-heard argument was that allowing debates would legitimize the opposition! Even in democratic countries such as Australia and Britain, the party in power typically tries to avoid debates.

Debate formats differ greatly around the world. In the Netherlands, questions are submitted before the debate and every candidate has time to answer them. This keeps the debate orderly and impersonal.

In Australia, however, there is a lot of invective and namecalling during debates. In Canada, the candidates don't just answer questions: they revert to a more traditional format and actually debate one another. In Uruguay, candidates exchange views in a very discursive "Latin" way, with long speeches full of rhetoric. In Poland, questions are posed by journalists (some invited by candidates themselves), by TV personalities, by the studio audience, and even by questioners calling in from home.

Televised debates in Greece sometimes include academics or other experts who question (and even respond to!) issues raised. But the questions asked are rather timid. It's no wonder. In the 1991 elections one journalist asked a conservative candidate some very tough questions. The politician's wife scolded the journalist publicly, and when her husband came to power the journalist lost his job.

How are the "leading candidates" cho-

sen for the debates? In parliamentary democracies in Europe, debaters are chosen by political parties since voters don't actually elect individuals. In Denmark, a complicated formula grants debate time to every party, even small Fascist and Trotskyite parties. The only requirement is that the party qualifies for the elections by collecting 20,000 signatures.

In Germany, parties with more than five percent of the vote in the last elections are permitted into the televised debates. In Finland, a total of 17 parties participated in the last debates. Smaller parties received less time than leading parties, but Finnish TV gave every party the same time for special programs on their platforms. Turkish candidates rotate through a daily 15-minute, cost-free, prime-time slot. All parties (even marginal parties like fascists, Communists and factions in the religious right) were given time for these pre-election speeches.

In many democracies, television stations give the candidates free access to the air waves for campaign advertising. In Britain, both governmental and independent television give cost-free prime-time access to main parties' campaign spots (usually right before the 9 p.m. news). Austria gives cost-free television time according to parties' proportional representation in its national parliament.

Many countries limit the time periods during which televised campaign ads may be broadcast. In Austria, the election campaign begins on a date set by the government only two or three months before election day. In Poland and Denmark, campaign advertising and debates end two or three days before the elections. In Turkey and Greece, campaign ads must stop Friday night before these countries' Sunday elections (but party-controlled TV often violates this law). German television stations are required by law to give cost-free air time to the parties according to their performance in the last elections. In Turkey, parties meeting certain conditions are given a lump sum by the state.

Canada also offers free time to its political parties. But parties and lobby groups can also buy additional television time. This favors wealthy interests.

Televised campaign advertising has been allowed in Finland only since 1991. In contrast, Australia recently instituted a ban on televised campaign advertising prior to federal elections which is being challenged on free speech grounds by commercial stations. The main reason given for the ban is that the ruling party is broke!

The style and tone of campaign coverage varies widely from country to country from largely objective reporting to extremely biased journalism. However, in most countries television is far more even-handed than newspapers. For example, Austrian law requires that all candidates for political office be covered objectively on television, nor are there influential commentators who sway public opinion. The same is true in Germany. Government-financed Danish TV is very careful not to favor any party, but local TV commentators are sometimes clearly affiliated with certain parties. British TV companies are obliged to provide fair coverage of all main parties. In Bangladesh, however, the news media are very biased towards ruling party candidates. The same goes in Canada, where the two ruling parties also receive the bulk of the coverage, so much so that the National Democratic Party, which won one-fourth of the vote in the last election, receives no favorable coverage or editorial support. In Mexico, the coverage is extremely biased in favor of the ruling party. In Sri Lanka, an extreme case, coverage is not only biased toward government views, but opposition journalists literally take their lives in their

Only 17 countries have a Gross National Product larger than total U.S. advertising expenditures. At $102 billion (1986) this figure was equal to Mexico's entire foreign debt.

Howard Frederick, *The World's Info-Rich and Info-Poor*

Alternate Networks: Computers Help Bridge Reporting Barriers

To pull the information together for this issue, I used some remarkable technology. I sent out a call for information on two worldwide computer networks, Usenet, the global academic network, and the APC Networks (Association for Progressive Communications), a computer system dedicated to human rights and environmental preservation. Within five days I received more than 100 responses to my questions from 35 countries.

My research for this story was only a small demonstration of the connective capacity of these systems. Other recent examples show how computer networks are transforming the information landscape—and the world:

• During the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest, Chinese students transmitted detailed, vivid reports by fax, telephone and computer network to activists throughout the world, making a protest that might once have been suppressed globally visible. Telephone circuits also circumvented official controls during the attempted coup in the Soviet Union in August 1991.

• Computer networks became a major outlet for uncensored news of the Persian Gulf War and its effects on the Third World, Israel and the Arab countries, as well as the worldwide anti-war movement. Competing action groups used computers to agree on common platforms, plot strategies and plan events across vast distances.

• The APC networks played a major role in resourcing the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Brazil, including an information-sharing service that made U.N. documents available worldwide. Other worldwide APC environmental and social justice projects range from helping U.S. students monitor river water quality to getting out the news of a neo-Nazi skinhead attack on foreigners in a Dresden, Germany neighborhood. All in all, tens of thousands of messages a day pass back and forth within the "APC village," and the number grows everyday.

—Howard Frederick

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hands. Opposing journalists are suppressed or even murdered. Although Sri Lankan law provides TV time for non-government candidates, few have the courage to speak. Turkish TV claims to be objective but in fact is highy politicized, no matter which party is in power. Uruguayan TV makes no attempt at all at objectivity.

Many Americans are influenced by the opinions they encounter in such alternative media channels as radio talk shows and alternative newspapers and magazines. With few exceptions, most other countries are very limited in providing such resources. Australian radio talk shows do have an important influence. Canada's insurgent third party relies on the trade union press and alternative media.

Greece, however, has a variety of alternative media sources that influence politics. One Greek satirical magazine has more influence than most daily newspapers. Greece is flooded with posters; every free surface, wall, fence, or tree is covered by them. Loudspeakers in every village blare out music and slogans. In Mexico, because of the ruling party's TV monopoly, alternative media play a significant role. These channels include the church, women's groups, labor unions, citizens' action groups and "popular organizations." Posters and graffiti are also widespread. In Poland, the alternative media are the pulpits in the Catholic churches, with priests endorsing candidates and parties.

In the end, we need to ask ourselves what kind of access American political candidates have to citizens by way of the public TV airwaves. What can we learn from how other countries handle "TV democracy?" Obviously we don't want to follow China or any other authoritarian model that gives access to the establishment and leaves the opposition at home in front of their sets—or worse.

It is simply impossible to talk about citizenship training in modern society without reference to mass communication.

Elihu Katz, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

As Americans, how can we make the U.S. system more just? The proportional system that guarantees access to all parties above a minimum support threshold (usually, five percent) seems fairer than the U.S. system with its stranglehold on access by the two major parties. More than 60 candidates are running for the U.S. presidency in 1992. Under the present system, Americans are denied the opportunity to hear any but the wealthy and well-connected.

Another possible improvement: providing candidates with at-cost or free access to campaign advertising during a designated period (say, 60 days) prior to the election, as many countries do. The TV airwaves are public property, after all. Broadcasters charge huge sums for political propaganda and could better serve the public by providing fair access at low or no cost. Mandatory concessions by broadcasters would help create a better-informed citizenry and take a tremendous burden (and hurdle to entry) off the candidates.

In the end, it is important to realize that the United States is fortunate to possess a more democratic system than many other countries, but certainly not a perfect system. Improvements can and must be made. People around the world are struggling with the same issues, and some of their innovations may apply to the American circumstances as well. We must not be satisfied with the status quo, but must continue to further democratize our country.

Howard Frederick is on the Board of Advisors for the Center and directs the Humanities Council-supported Californians in Dialogue for the Common Good. He is the author of Global Communication and International Relations *(Brooks-Cole).*

Re:Action

Teaching Media Democracy: Three Days to Insight

A major challenge in democratic education is teaching young people about the need to air opposing views and provide channels of expression for dissenting voices.

In the highly charged atmosphere of modern Israel, communications researcher Elihu Katz searched for a method to make tangible to young people the legitimacy of opposition at each level in the democratic process. A brief description of the three-day workshop he and his colleagues developed may provide tips for other teachers and educational leaders around the world.

Day One: Workshop is announced as a communications seminar (a more appealing, often less controversial subject). Game and role-playing sensitizes students to the pitfalls of accurate observation, selective perception and witness psychology. Student "journalists" pair up to research subjects for inclusion in a group "newscast" about their school. The assignment forces them to consider problems of selection, expert testimony and reliability. The whole group selects the newscast story budget, usually provoking intense discussion. Issues of administration censorship, loyalty, school spirit, etc., may be debated.

Day Two: Students repeat the procedure for the national news, using yesterday's newspapers to "create" a television broadcast. News selection criteria are reviewed. During discussion, students may note that their evaluation of school events was more critical and more change-oriented. They are encouraged to compare their views of school and national authorities. Broadcast of an actual newscast provides a chance for comparison.

Day Three: Analysis of a set of video news items dealing with all aspects of an episode mishandled by authorities provides another view of authority decisionmaking. Because they featured various points of view and demonstrated evidence of authority bungling, Israeli researchers showed reports of nearly successful invasion of an Israeli beach by terrorists. Students wrestle with the apparent conflict between the "facts" and their attitudes toward participants.

MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD:
How Talk Radio Can Work for You

By Barbara Osborn

Institutional changes in the way the media operates are necessary to keep healthy democratic dialogue alive. But while we work towards fundamental changes in the way the media works, the public can tap newspapers, radio, and TV to make their voices heard. Too few members of the public take advantage of these opportunities.

What can *you* do? One of the quickest, easiest, and least expensive steps you can take is to call radio talk shows.

Talk radio has become immensely popular across the country. Hundreds of talk radio shows are on the air. You may not listen to them but millions of people do. In fact, 11.6 million listeners tune in to Rush Limbaugh and his callers each week. The efforts of some hosts — Michael Jackson, Larry Josephson, and Rush Limbaugh, among others — are distributed nationwide. Some are strictly local. Not all talk shows discuss political issues, but many do. Talk radio provides an electronic forum, not unlike the town square 200 years ago, for the public exchange of ideas and opinion. Like the broadsides and pamphlets of those days, talk radio represents a wide spectrum of political opinion.

Talk radio not only offers the public an opportunity to air opinions and discuss issues, it can also wield meaningful political power. In 1989, when Congress was about to vote itself a pay raise, a coalition of talk show hosts galvanized the public and defeated the measure.

You may feel a little uncomfortable or nervous about the idea of calling a radio show. Don't be embarrassed. Lots of people feel that way. Most of us were taught how to pull a voting lever or write to the President, but are less familiar with how the broadcasting media works. It takes practice. Before you make your call arrange a role-playing session with a friend or colleague. Select a topic and have your listener act as the host. Jot down a few notes for yourself and practice what you're going to say.

Once you're comfortable with calling, get ambitious. Talk show hosts are always looking for new people and new ideas to present on their shows. Survey talk radio shows in your region. Get to know the subject matter, politics, and style of individual show hosts. Knowing the terrain will help you determine which shows to approach with your agenda. You can approach talk show producers with a press release followed up by a phone call or simply by phone. (Don't forget to plan what you're going to say before you call!)

Chaim Singer Frankes is a freelance illustrator in Los Angeles.

MEMBERS MAY COPY THESE TWO PAGES
FOR DISCUSSION OR GROUP ACTIVITY.

REFLECTION RESOURCE

Tips to Help Make Talk Radio Work for You:

1. Don't expect to call and be instantly connected to the host. Call-in shows hire people to screen callers. In theory, this person is there to make sure that you're sane and won't swear on the air, but screeners' roles are actually more complex. They make judgments about how your opinion will fit into the overall context of discussion as well as whether you represent a geographical area they want to hear from.

Sound calm and reasonable when talking to screeners. Don't act angry—even if you're boiling inside. A little flattery never hurts. Tell the screener that important points have been made on the show and that you want to offer some additional perspectives.

2. Know what you're going to say. Be prepared and get to the point. Think in sound bites. You'll have 30-60 seconds to make your point. Write down notes beforehand that will help you remember your ideas when you go on air.

3. Once you call, don't tune out the show. In order to make the best use of your air time, you're going to need to know what's been said between the time you call and the time you go on air. Revise your points as you hear others make comments relevant to yours. Be prepared to be on hold for a while and to turn down your radio as soon as you go on air.

4. Support your argument with facts and solid logic. References to studies, articles, etc. always help.

5. Don't make a speech. If you have several points to make, highlight the most important one first; that may be all the air time you have. After you've made your first point, pause and let the host get a word in edgewise. Try and allow for dialogue.

6. Try not to get nervous. Pretend that you're talking to a friend.

If You're Not Getting Through, Here Are Some Additional Tricks:

1. National shows often make an effort to hear from different parts of the country. Calling from an area that the show doesn't receive a lot of calls from may increase your chances of getting on the air.

2. Most shows try for balance and will include at least a few opinions that contradict the host. If you suspect that only sympathetic callers are getting through, don't let the screener know your real opinion. Once you're on the air, you're on your own.

3. If you're desperate to get to the top of a heap of waiting callers, remember that callers from car and pay phones often get priority!

Remember that how much air time you get isn't a question of how smart you sound. The host always knows how many calls are waiting. If a lot of callers are waiting to be heard from, the host will probably try to keep each call brief.

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND VALUES
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WATCH, READ, LISTEN

Resources for Follow-up

IN PRINT

Media Power Politics, by David L. Paletz and Robert M. Entman, unravels the complex network of influence that links the press, political elites and the public in modern America (1981). Free Press, Macmillan Publishing, 100 Front St., Riverside, NJ 08075; (800)257-5755, $14.95.

The Interplay of Influence: News, Advertising, Politics and the Mass Media looks at how politicians, advertisers and journalists use the media's influence to shape what we think, and how we, in turn can affect the media, by Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Cambell (1992). Wadsworth, 7625 Empire Dr., Florence, KY 41042; (800)354-9706, $16.

Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion and Policymaking, edited by David L. Protess and Maxwell McCombs, an anthology for advanced undergraduate and beginning graduate students on the agenda-setting influence of the news media (1991). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 365 Broadway, Hillsdale, NJ 07642; (201)666-4110, $29.95.

Listening for a President: A Citizen's Campaign Methodology. Given the biases they see as inherent in the media, Ruth M. Gonchar Brennan and Dan F. Hahn propose a new method of evaluating candidates for presidential office using careful listening and analysis (1990). Praeger, Greenwood Publishing, 88 Post Rd. West, Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881; (203)226-3571, $45.

Rediscovering America's Values by Frances Moore Lappé stresses the importance of communication in ensuring a vigorous future in any democratic society (1989.) Ballantine Books, Random House, 400 Hahn Rd., Westminster, MD 21157; (800)733-3000, $22.50.

The United States of Ambition, Alan Ehrenhalt, analyzes what politics and politicians have become and what voters do and should expect from them (1991). Random House; $12.

The Good Society, Robert Bellah, et. al. argue that a shared understanding of the common good can lead to an effective democracy and that public discourse and debate about our national problems must be renewed, enlivened, and enriched (1991). Alfred A. Knopf, 201 E. 50th St., New York, NY 10022; (212)751-2600, $25.

Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy by William Greider, shows the reality of the link between government and corporations and how the citizens can regain control of the decision-making process (1992). Simon & Schuster, 200 Old Tappan Rd., Old Tappan, NJ 07675; (201)767-5957, (800)223-2336, $24.50.

Why Americans Hate Politics, E.J. Dionne, Jr., looks at the differences between the political parties' values and ideology to explain why voters are frustrated with politics (1992). Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, $12

Habits of the Heart explores the conflict between Americans' fierce individualism and their urgent need for community and commitment to one another. Robert Bellah, et. al. (1985). HarperCollins, Keystone Industrial Park, Scranton, PA 18512; (212)207-7000, $12.

Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America by James Davidson Hunter, looks at the struggle between traditional religious values and progressive values in issues of family, law, politics, education and art (1991). Basic Books, HarperCollins, PO Box 588, Dunmore, PA 18512; (800)331-3761, $25.

Coming to Public Judgement: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World examines the role of the public's opinion in politics and how to improve it. Daniel Yankelovich (1991). Syracuse University Press, 1600 Jamesville Ave., Syracuse, NY 13244-5160; (800)365-8929, $16.95.

Citizens and Politics: A View From Main Street, a report from the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, identifies what people say about politics, why they hold those views and how they think about them (1991). Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Rd., Dayton, OH 45459-2799: (513)434-7300, full report: $1.50, executive summary: $1.

SIGHT/SOUND

A Public Voice reveals ways in which the press and our political leadership typically approach national problems such as race, abortion and international issues, 58 min. (1991). Kettering Foundation; $6, media kit upon request.

A World of Ideas with Bill Moyers: Robert Bellah talks about global interdependence and the need to find a moral meaning for life in light of our technical advances and media addiction, 30 min. (1989). PBS Video, 1320 Braddock Pl., Alexandria, VA 22314; (800)344-3337; $39.95.

The 30-Second President, episode 16 from *A Walk Through the 20th Century With Bill Moyers*, looks at the history of political advertising in the age of television and the influence television has had on politics, 58 min. (1984). PBS Video; $59.95.

The Betrayal of Democracy. As part of the Frontline series, journalist William Geider examines the breakdown of democracy in the U.S. and how citizens can become involved in restoring our political system, 120 min. (1992). PBS Video; $89.95.

Guerilla Media, with media specialist Tony Schwartz, shows ordinary consumers how to gain access to media in order to air their views and change society, 120 min. (1988). Varied Directions, Films for the Humanities and Sciences, PO Box 2053, Princeton, NJ 08543; (800)257-5126, purchase: $199, rental: $75.

How I Use Media in Politics, by Tony Schwartz, discusses his techniques for political advertising, including how advertisers involve the audience and get people to listen and use of negative campaigning, 90 min. (1988). Varied Directions, Films for the Humanities and Sciences; purchase: $199, rental: $75.

OTHER VIEWS:
Organizational Alternatives

Dependence on mainstream media for information severely limits the average citizen's ability to take a meaningful part in the political process or even make an informed decision about political candidates. The following organizations are dedicated to presenting alternative viewpoints or broadening the scope of political discourse. Look into resources in your own community to find organizations with similar goals.

The Institute for Global Communications (IGC), provides computer networking tools for international communications and information exchange and computer networks worldwide. The IGC Networks—PeaceNet, EcoNet and ConflictNet—are the world's first and only computer communications system dedicated solely to environmental preservation, peace and human rights. Each network provides its subscribers with electronic mail, private and public computer conferences and access to vast information resources. IGC, 18 De Boom Street, San Francisco, CA 94107; (415) 442-0220.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), offers well-documented media criticism in an effort to correct bias against peace issues, public interest and minority viewpoints. *Extra!*, FAIR's journal, (8 issues/yr, with membership, $30), reports on bias, media mergers, censored news and the connections between press and the state. FAIR has conducted special analyses of *Nightline* and *The McNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*. FAIR, 130 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001; (212) 633-6700.

Media Network/Alternative Media Information Center, a national membership organization promoting alternative media productions, publishes two media guides a year evaluating new social issue videos and films and conducts related conferences and workshops. The center also publishes a quarterly newsletter called *ImMEDIAte Impact* and sponsors various alternative media projects. Media Network, 39 West 14th St., Ste.#403, New York, NY 10011; (212) 929-2663.

The Institute for Media Analysis produces *Lies of our Times*, a monthly journal intended to "correct the record" by exposing media lies, hypocrisies, and omissions, especially in the *New York Times*. The institute also maintains a research library with hard to find books on intelligence, cover-ups and covert operations, and publishes books and monographs on related subjects by authors on staff at the institute. Institute for Media Analysis, 145 West 4th St., New York, NY 10012; (212) 254-1061.

"Ask Not What Your Country Can Do..."

Unrestricted public discourse and government criticism are two of the most important values in any democracy. The following groups are working to stimulate the process of public discourse and critical commentary in the U.S.

The Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Rd., Dayton, OH 45459-2799; (513)434-7300.

Institute for the Arts of Democracy, 36 Eucalyptus Lane, Ste. #100, San Rafael, CA 94901; (415)453-3333.

Public Agenda Foundation, 6 E. 39th St., New York, NY 10016; (212)686-6610.

National Issues Forum, 100 Commons Rd., Dayton, OH 45459-2777; (800)433-7834.

Study Circles Resource Center, Route 169, P.O. Box 203, Pomfret, CT 06258; (203)928-2616.

Project Censored's 1976 beginnings were based in founder Carl Jensen's dissatisfaction with low-key pre-election media coverage of the Watergate break-in. The nationally respected project has established a regular process dedicated to exposing and publicizing overlooked or underreported stories on important issues. Selected stories have covered political and military corruption, health threats, and the environment. Project Censored, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA 94928; (707) 664-2500.

The Media Foundation publishes *ADBUSTERS Quarterly*, subtitled "The Journal of the Mental Environment." The hard-hitting publication features essays, cartoons and media activism suggestions aimed at helping readers recognize—and clean up—advertising and consumerism's polluting effects on the mental and physical environment. The foundation also produces anti-advertising and pollution "commercials" (its "Talking Forest", "First World Excess" and "Tubehead" campaigns) which can be purchased inexpensively for use on local TV stations. Media Foundation, 1243 W. 7th Ave., Vancouver, BC V6H 1B7; (604) 736-9401.

The Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan and nonprofit research and educational organization, analyzes the treatment of social and political issues by entertainment media. The results of such content analysis are published in *Media Monitor* (10 issues per year for $50). The center's monograph, *Balance and Diversity in PBS Documentaries*, made news and caused a certain amount of controversy. Doctors S. Robert and Linda S. Lichter, the founders of the center, have just written a book, *Watching America: What TV Tells Us about Our Lives*, based on a content analysis of 30 years of entertainment television. The Center for Media and Public Affairs, 2101 "L" Street NW, #405, Washington, DC 20037; (202) 223-2942.

Deep Dish TV is the first national grass-roots satellite network providing community-based programming to national cable access stations. **Deep Dish** is a spin-off of **Paper Tiger Television**, an alternative, independent broadcaster. Paper Tiger develops half-hour videos which critique mainstream media and analyze its impact on social and political life. Deep Dish broadcasts such alternative programs to public-access cable stations across the U.S. For example, the 1992 Deep Dish spring season is titled *Unheard Voices*, a broad range of shows providing airtime to groups not represented in the mass media. Deep Dish TV, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012; (212) 473-8933. Paper Tiger, same address, (212)420-9045.

A longtime outlet for alternative viewpoints, **Pacifica Radio** provides a range of non-commercial radio programming aired on five Pacifica stations and other community radio outlets. A closely related non-profit organization, the **NFCB (National Federation of Community Broadcasters)** provides member stations with Congressional representation, consulting services, legal and reference publications and an annual Community Radio Conference. Pacifica Productions, P.O. Box 8092, Universal City, CA, 91608-0092; (818) 506-1077. NFCB, 666 11th St. NW, Ste. #805, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 393-2355.

—David Ruth, editorial assistant

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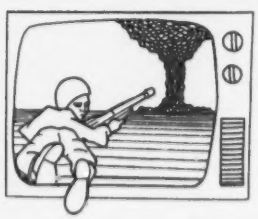

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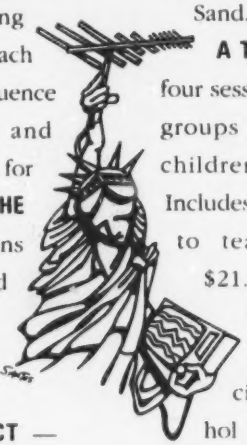

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co-author, The Good Society